SCIENCE & GOVERNMENT REPORT

11th Year of Publication

The Independent Bulletin of Science Policy

Volume XI, No. 16 | P.O. Box 6226A, Washington, D.C. 20015 | October 1, 1981

Science Academy Head Vows Major Policy Role

After three-and-a-half years as President Carter's Science Adviser, Frank Press took office in July as President of the National Academy of Sciences—the $65-million-a-year complex that's both the honorary peak of American science and the Congressionally chartered science counselor to the federal government. Press's administration commences at a time when some observers feel that the Academy's importance in national scientific affairs has diminished and that the institution may be no more than a relic of simpler times. Press discussed these and other matters September 15 in a conversation in Washington with SGR editor D.S. Greenberg. Following is an edited text of that talk.

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SGR. What are you going to do with this place?

Press. First let me get to understand it. It's a big operation...I've got 1300 bosses. Despite what you said in your last issue ("sunken influence" of the NAS—SGR Vol. XI, No. 13), I'm impressed that it's a significant force. The basis for that is that I've already talked to the Administration and agency people, and the highest priority problems on their desks are those we have been working on and which we will work on. These are important national issues, and when you see where they can go to get some help, some reviews, advice, analysis, there are not many places. They're not going to go to profitmaking corporations. Some of these issues require panels of people who won't go to work anywhere else. They're all busy with something, but when I call them they'll come.

Activist Stance Proposed for NSF's Top Policy—Page 7

SGR. The Defense Department had no trouble getting the Townes panel together [for an MX-basing study headed by Charles Townes, Nobel-laureate physicist].

Press. I'm talking about the non-defense area. Defense is a separate issue. The Townes group was essentially the Defense Science Board, except for the chairman. That's interesting in itself. I'm not concerned...From what I've seen since I've been here—if you look at the problems of the next decade—I think we're going to be busy...We're turning out a couple of hundred reports a year. But there are only 20 or 25 that are really of consequence. The nitrite reports, the [forthcoming report on] health effects of marijuana—people are just waiting at the door for that report. Then there's something new that I've started which I'm very excited about. Howard Johnson [MIT Board Chairman] is chairing a panel made up of CEO's [chief executive officers] of companies, university presidents. I think that in the next decade, but starting now, the industrial democracies—the summit nations, Germany, France, the US—are all going to be fostering the same high technology industries. There's going to be a cutthroat competition with the possibilities for political devisiveness, economic nationalism, and of particular importance to the scientific community, impediments to the flow of scientists and scientific information. You can see elements of it right now. The Germans, for the first time, overturned a winning American bid on a computer. They never did that before. The letter that ARPA [the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency] sent to universities [about access of foreign students and researchers to certain types of unclassified advanced electronics research]; concern at some federal agencies about foreign graduate students taking certain

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In Brief

The Reagan Administration's unilateral abandonment of the American-European International Solar Polar space mission (SGR Vol. XI, No. 15) is regarded with considerable disdain by White House Science Adviser George A. Keyworth.

In an on-the-record interview with SGR, Keyworth said, "I find it a very awkward situation, because I very much sympathize with the [protesting] European space scientists." Keyworth added, "No way I can defend this [the mission cancellation]. It's a thorn in our side, a disgrace."

Support for restoring the mission to its original two-satellite status is contained in a newly issued report by a National Research Council panel specially appointed to study various options. On a cost-to-benefit ratio, it said, the initial plan comes out best.

NSF made a survey of fulltime faculty members in 20 fields of science and engineering and concluded that mathematicians have the shortest average work week—41 hours; for engineers, physical, life, and social scientists, the week averaged 48 to 51 hours. The findings are contained in NSF 81-317, available without charge from: NSF, Division of Science Resources Studies, Washington, DC 20550.

...International Pacts on Basic Science Funds?

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courses. It's not military stuff. It's all based on economic competition...I'm thinking about what this means for relations between allies, and about what can be done to mitigate this problem. I've already spoken to senior officials in this Administration, at Commerce and State at the sub-cabinet level, and with [George] Keyworth [Reagan's science adviser]. They say that this issue is of great concern to them. And they're delighted for us to deal with it. So, I have in mind a review, a prediction of possible trends. Just pointing up these issues to policymakers in our country—corporate leaders, university presidents—so that they can start worrying about them, with some recommendations for policies that can offset the potential negative aspects. You're going to have the competition, there's no doubt about it. What I'm worried about is that it won't be a free-market competition, there will be all sorts of restrictions. There are possible positive steps that can be taken: International agreements on the level of support of basic research by each country as a social contribution to everybody. Isn't that extraordinary?

SGR. It makes you wonder about the feasibility.

Press. Well, what the hell, you explore these things. I don't mind hatching this thing now and have it turned down five years in a row, ten years in a row.

SGR. We've never had a *national* agreement on levels of support for basic research.

Press. I'm talking about a second high-technology industrial revolution. I'm talking about extraordinary times. I'm talking about the image of Japan in this country as one that exploits American basic research. I'm talking about a degree of divisiveness that we may never have seen before. Cooperation in global projects like fusion would mitigate some of this. And certainly, the dangers to the scientific enterprise, in terms of approvals for international meetings, restrictions on foreign graduate students, and so on—that's very worrisome. We should look into that. Let's see what the consequences are, and explain to the policymakers that there are some negative aspects of this where we can be doing some damage—whether they're American policymakers or Japanese, or French, or German.

SGR. Where does this study stand at the moment?

Press. The chairman has been appointed. It's funded [by foundations, soon to be announced]...for a couple of hundred thousand. And I believe we will get some $50,000 from OSTP [Office of Science and Technology Policy] . . . As I said, there are some 20 studies a year...that I want to pay special attention to in terms of quality control, progress, timeliness, the excellence of the panelists, the review procedure, the way the information is disseminated at the end of these studies. I want to be able to have some degree of independence, with maybe a quarter or a third of these studies, to initiate them ourselves...to get some independence of the government. We still want to be a reliable friend and adviser to the government, but I don't want a study to hinge on our ability to get money, because there are some issues that we identify as important that are not on the plate of a government agency, and we should do it anyway.

SGR. Your predecessor found it difficult to get that kind of money.

Press. I want to have a crack at it. I think I can get project support, foundation money to do these projects...I'd like to try. We haven't really tried for a long time, since Fred Seitz [NAS President, 1962-69] raised most of our endowment. We need that degree of independence. I would like to move in the direction of having more Academy members in residence here as part of some of these projects. I'd like to have some of them spend a year here. Like Don Fredrickson [former Director of the National Institutes of Health] is here. He's enormously useful to me as a sounding board, as a wise person. I'd like to have more of that. I'd like to have five or ten Academy members here at any one time.

SGR. What about cutting down on certain operations here that may have lost their relevance to current problems?

Press. I have no pre-conceived notions about how big we should be, or whether we should get bigger or

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ISSN 0048-9581

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Independently published by *Science & Government Report,* Inc., twice monthly, except once in January, June & July. Annual Subscription: Institutions, $127.50 (two years, $220.00); individuals, $55.00 (two years, $95.00). Editorial offices at 3736 Kanawha St. N.W., Washington, DC 20015. Tel. (202) 244-4135. Second-class postage paid at Washington, DC. Please address all subscription correspondence to Box 6226A, Northwest Station, Washington, DC 20015. Reproduction without permission is prohibited. SGR is available on Xerox University Microfilms. Claims for missing back issues will be filled without charge if made within six months of publication date.

..."Disappointed" by Cuts in Lab Equipment

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smaller. My main concern is to ask what is the significance of the things we undertake and our ability to manage them. If we can serve a public purpose at any level that's non-trivial, that's worth managing—that's the level we should be at. I don't want the Academy to grow much, if at all, because I don't want to worry about more buildings and more space...I have appointed a major committee...to look into the organization of the NRC [National Research Council, through which NAS conducts studies] ten years after it assumed its present structure...It will be chaired by Jim Ebert, the NAS Vice President...

SGR. What are your relations with [Director] Keyworth and the White House science office?

Press. Jay [Keyworth] is doing something that is very wise. He's moving out, he's establishing his network with the scientific world. He's met with me, with the head of the AAAS [American Association for the Advancement of Science] and the heads of IEEE [Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers], and all the organizations.

SGR. He may be okay, but the Administration he works for is antediluvian in the way it hacked at the social sciences and in what's happening to the space program. They've reneged on space agreements with the European Space Agency...

Press. That bothers me, too. And the social-science cutbacks also...Let me put it this way: Reagan is embarked on a major economic experiment. He wants to knock inflation down. It's an extraordinary experiment. He's cutting everybody. Really everybody.

SGR. He's not cutting Defense.

Press. ...He's cutting everybody in the civil sector, and he's going to have to start cutting Defense. To make a special case for science over inner-city jobs and welfare is tough. But he's treated science very well—the hard sciences—and the NIH budget, the NSF budget. But he's cut back on space, and his initial efforts in the social sciences—they weren't simply a cut. They would have caused massive, permanent damage, including the data base that everybody uses. But then there's been a second look at that and it seems that some repairs will be made to those cuts through the Congressional route. But now there's talk of another iteration of budget cuts because of the high interest rates. So, everybody is going to feel the pain...Nevertheless, the scientific and technological enterprise, in the long term, is the wave of the future, and is the way to this country's economic success...And it's going to be my job to point up, as a leading spokesman for science and technology, what the scientists and the engineers in the institutions of this country can contribute to the future economic success of this country. And if I think the budget cuts are too severe, to the extent of damage, I'll go to work and make my views known.

SGR. Do you regard yourself as a collaborator of the Administration or as an independent adviser and, possibly, a critic, when appropriate?

Press. As an independent adviser, if called upon; as a critic, if necessary; as an ally and friend...but as an ally and friend who can criticize or commend....

SGR. In general then, apart from the social sciences...you feel that this Administration has been good to science?

Press. I was disappointed, as I said before, in the cutback in the social sciences and the way it was done, and the cutback on the instrumentation program [for which Carter had budgeted $75 million for university laboratories]...People were telling me that the products of today's engineering schools are five years behind the times because they didn't get "hands-on" experience. That bothered me. The fact that that program was cut out was a mistake in terms of long-term investment in the economic viability of the nation...The support of the hard-core NSF budget was at a time when they cut everything else...The support of the NIH basic research budget was a sensitive treatment when a lot of other things received painful cuts.

SGR. What about the dismantling of the Cooperative Automotive Research Program [CARP—initiated by Press, but not yet in operation when Reagan took office] and other of the Carter Administration's industrial innovation initiatives?

Press. The Reagan Administration has a basic philosophical view about the role of the federal government...That was the basis for their election. What at-

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Shift in Top NAS Staff Post

Philip M. Smith, an old hand around Washington science-policy circles, will become Executive Officer of the National Research Council—the working arm of the National Academy of Sciences—on January 1, according to an announcement from his old boss, Carter Science Adviser Frank Press, who is President of the NAS. As Executive Officer, Smith will succeed Paul L. Sitton, who, for the past 18 months, has also held the post of Assistant to the NAS President. The announcement said Sitton will retain that latter post "to devote his full attention once again to our relations with Congress and the executive agencies."

...Cool Toward Some Carter R&D Initiatives

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tracted me to CARP was that this was a basic research program, that the federal government has a tradition of the support of basic research—and the Reagan Administration has accepted that tradition. And here industry was going to pay fifty cents on the dollar for something that the federal government had a tradition of doing anyway. CARP was an interesting institutional partnership. I was disappointed that it was cut out. On some of the other parts of the Carter innovation program, I wasn't much of a fan of them.

SGR. Which ones?

Press. Some of the generic technology centers. Jordan Baruch [Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Science and Technology under Carter] and I are the dearest friends...He won that issue. It was popular in Congress, as you recall...It's hard to know what the federal government's role is. You can't thrust it on [industries] that don't want it...But I'm always willing to experiment to see what happens...

SGR. What are your feelings about the role of public opinion in complex regulatory matters, such as the placement of nuclear reactors, strip mining, power development in the West?

Press. I think there must be a mechanism where people locally can have a voice in things that are going to happen near to them...They should have a shot at it, so to speak. But I think the system that evolved over the years, where it isn't just one hearing, but it's multiple ones, has so delayed decisions and construction time and approvals, so that the process itself has reached a point where a nuclear power plant becomes uneconomical. It takes 12 to 15 years to build one. We can't afford it; the electricity will be too expensive...

SGR. Will the Academy have any significant role concerning military technology?

Press. There are two aspects to that. One, will we be asked? I don't know. And do we want to? If you look at the resources that are proposed in the military area over the next few years, the growth of those resources is absolutely stupendous, enormous. Should that money be poorly, inefficiently spent, it could represent a national mistake of historic proportions. If we can help in any way to provide any insights we can toward better decision-making on how these funds should be expended, I would respond positively. There are certain things I would not do, that I would not want to do, nor would my membership want me to do; get involved with things like biological warfare—how to kill better and things like that. But there are issues about the voluntary army versus the draft which concern manpower training, education, men at a certain level of education and complex machine interaction, issues of communication. These are issues which, if we were asked, I would seriously consider a positive response.

SGR. But would you consider stepping out, without having been asked, and undertaking a study of, let's say, MX or some other big technical issue of the moment?

Press. We couldn't study the MX issue without being asked, for the simple reason that, without a briefing, our conclusions are likely to be uninformed. You've got to know the facts, most of which are classified. If you're told that the Minuteman is vulnerable, you've got to see why. You've got to ask a lot of questions, the answers to which could be classified...There are certain kinds of things in the defense area we couldn't do on our own, simply because we'd need that kind of access and briefing.

Press. But there are issues that wouldn't be so dependent upon classified information where the Academy, on its own, could make a contribution to the public dialog. For example, will the increase in defense spending strip civilian industry?

Press. The issues of manpower, the shortages engendered by the defense buildup—we will do that. It's very important to the country. Yes, on our own or commissioned by other agencies, or by the Defense Department. I have talked to the Defense Department about precisely this...about the questions of shortages in key fields engendered by many things, including their great demand, and how they might respond in a positive way to help ease the shortage...

SGR. Critics say that defense technology has become over-elaborate to the point of being dysfunctional...

Press. I'm intensely interested in that, as was my predecessor...He brought those issues to the [NAS] Council as possible areas for Academy participation, and I'd like to follow through on those, as well. There's an advantage to being asked, although some things we should do even though we're not asked. The advantage to being asked is that you have somebody to go back and report to, the person who requested it...

SGR. Isn't there an advantage to taking up subjects on your own initiative?

Press. And I'd like to do that. And some of these may be among them.

SGR. Including the over-elaboration of military technology?

Press. Possibly, possibly. I'm not sure. I'd want to see who else is doing it, whether they're doing it as well as we might or better, It's an area of great importance and I don't like to stay out of areas of great importance.

NSF Board Head Urges Expanded Role

With science policy nowhere visible on the Reagan agenda, Chairman Lewis M. Branscomb of the National Science Board (NSB)—the top policy body of the National Science Foundation—is trying to persuade his colleagues that the Board should strive for influence beyond the confines of NSF.

The idea, however, isn't going down well with the 24-member Board, a parttime collection of academics and industrialists that's never been noted for imperialistic designs. In fact, its most notable achievement in recent times was a statement of polite acceptance of the Reagan-Stockman savaging of the social sciences and other chunks of the NSF budget (SGR Vol. XI, No. 8)—a clear abdication of its statutory role as NSF's policymaker.

As unpalatable as the Branscomb idea may be to some NSB members, it's likely to be even more so for the Reagan Administration, within which the Foundation and its Board contain some of the very few remaining holdovers from Carter days. Branscomb, who is Vice President and Chief Scientist of IBM, was appointed to the Board by Carter for the regular six-year term, in 1978, and was elected Chairman—that's a two-year term—in May 1980. All other Board members predate the present Administration, as does the Director of NSF, John Slaughter, who's got five years to go on a six-year appointment.

NSF/NSB, though studiously non-political, is thus an anomaly in an intensely ideological, sweep-'em-out Administration. Which may account for the chilly reception that the Branscomb proposal received when he brought it up at the Board's most recent meeting, May 18, in Washington.

Branscomb strongly denies that his goal is to turn the NSB into the equivalent of the old President's Science Advisory Committee (PSAC), which, after a long hiatus, is likely to be resurrected by President Reagan's Science Adviser, George A. Keyworth, though at a less elevated level than before (SGR Vol. XI, No.15). Yet, according to Branscomb, there are many ways that the Board could and should exploit its stature, and that of NSF, to represent the interests of the scientific community, on issues ranging from the future of engineering education and manpower to the promotion of international collaboration in scientific research.

Other members of the Board may take some convincing. There has always been tension concerning the scope of the NSF/NSB mandate, with the winning line being that the two institutions should restrict themselves primarily to ensuring the quality of the basic research programs over which they share responsibility. But there have always been accompanying pressures, frequently originating from Congress, for both to take public stands on issues of broad scientific and technological interest.

Branscomb made it clear at the meeting that he sides with the latter camp, and that for a variety of reasons he feels it's time for the Board to move into the public limelight. "I think that the Board underestimates its potential influence," he said. "For example, a number of people in industry read enough to be aware that there is a debate taking place on the state of the country's technology, and some of them are getting uneasy about where the country stands. They might read with interest a newspaper article by some academic organization or professional group, but they would probably be seriously influenced by a report or statement from the National Science Board."

Many of Branscomb's views about an enlargement of the role of the NSB are crystalized in a report prepared for him by Philip Smith, who was Associate Director of the Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) under President Carter. (Last week, Smith joined the National Academy of Sciences to work for its new President—his former White House boss—Frank Press.) In the intervening period since leaving OSTP, he has been working with Branscomb on a study of the evolution of science-policy institutions in Washington, and how the NSB could adapt itself to the new environment and increase its role at the same time.

Describing the main conclusions of his report to the Board members, Smith said that NSF was now a "mature organization," and that "some of the reticence of the Foundation leadership and of the National Science Board to launch out on issues" was out of date.

"We are in a more pluralistic system than we were 15 or 20 years ago," said Smith, adding that "The outside world of universities, professional societies, and industrial research organizations is looking for some kind of entity on the Washington scene to provide the leadership that has been lacking in recent years. For several reasons there seems to be general agreement that there is not likely to emerge a mechanism such as the PSAC, the sort of science and technology policy-making entity that was the focus of thinking in the 1960s and early 1970s. So there is a vacuum that in many respects needs to be filled," he argued.

Smith told the members of the Board that, although they should probably not get involved in issues that only indirectly impinge on research, such as the role of science in regulation or the assessment of technology, the Board should still not draw a tight boundary around its area of interest, for example, by omitting the activities of the private sector from its discussions.

He suggested that executive bodies such as OSTP

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...A Cool Response Toward Activist Proposal

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and the Office of Management and Budget "would welcome careful work by the Board on many issues which need attention." Policy areas which could currently benefit from close scrutiny, he said, included science and engineering education, the problems of maintaining up-to-date research instrumentation in universities, and the impact of export controls on communication between scientists.

In the case of education, Smith said that members of the Board "really must come up with a strategy appropriate to the 1980s," noting that "the earlier [post-Sputnik] strategy had really faded by the end of the 1960s, which is why there has been so much confusion in recent years." More generally, the NSF was now in a different position from the past. "It has become a big and mature organization which is respected throughout the world. The time has come to think in terms of what the next steps are for the NSF as an institution. It is an opportunity to reform its work and keep the institution alive."

Discussion of Smith's report was kicked off by Herbert Doan, Vice-Chairman of the Board, President of his own venture capital company, and a Director of the Dow Chemical Company. Doan was generally skeptical of the suggested expansionist strategy. He emphasized the warning comments made by some of the reviewers of a draft version of Smith's report, noting in particular a reviewer's reference to a comment by the late Alan Waterman, NSF's first Director, that "science is conducted in such a bottom-up way that 'policies' have a way of not working."

Doan conceded that it might be valuable for the Board to make occasional public statements ("one a year or so") on subjects which happened to be topical, and where such a statement might help to stir some type of action. Also that "we should be spending more time setting out things that other people can think about," spelling out options for future international scientific collaboration, for example. But more generally, he suggested, "policy-making only works if it is associated with some authority"—authority which the Board lacked in several of the areas that were being proposed.

Others concentrated their comments on some of the more specific criticisms that Smith had made of the way the Board currently operates. Marian E. Koshland of the University of California, Berkeley, said that "a lot of policy [work] is done [by the Board], but it is not sufficiently well-articulated because we find we are responding to a series of crises," as well as suffering from a lack of continuity in membership. Others defended the amount of time that the Board spends in reviewing NSF programs grants. Such surveillance, they argued, helps maintain quality control over NSF's activities; in addition, it "is the closest that the Board gets to the science that is done in the NSF," said Lloyd Cooke, Vice-Chairman of the Economic Development Council of New York.

NSF Director John Slaughter seemed reluctant to be pushed into the limelight in the way that Smith was suggesting. "I am inclined to think after reading the report that if you differentiate between effectiveness and efficiency, we probably are more effective in terms of responding to critical issues facing the NSF than we are efficient in addressing what we can accomplish," he said. "The question is not how far we can expand, but how we can improve the efficiency of what we already do."

This did not satisfy Branscomb. "The NSF underestimates the influence that it can have," he told Slaughter. "I would urge the Director of NSF not to underestimate the prestige of his office. I can imagine the Director loading us with work he thinks we should be doing to enable him to achieve what he wants to achieve. There should be a significant amount of joint work and debate between the Board committees and the top management of the Foundation."

John Hogness, President of the Association of Academic Health Centers, was even blunter. Raising the subject of "style and approach," he said that in the past, top officials of NSF had been too passive on important national policy questions. "There is a real need

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PACs Seek to Boost Science

The Reagan Administration's zest for parsimony has inspired the formation of a couple of grassroots political groups concerned with promoting the interests of science on Capitol Hill.

SCITEC-PAC, a political action committee established by a group of government interns this summer, plans to contribute to the campaigns of candidates for Congress "who advocate and demonstrate strong support for research and training in science and engineering." The Action Committee on Technology, ACT, formed by a student at the University of Virginia, will lobby Congress on issues benefiting basic research in the biological and physical sciences and science education. Both groups claim scientists took a fiscal beating in Reagan's first budget because they were not politically involved in defending their research programs. SCITEC-PAC is at 305 Massachusetts Ave. NE, Washington, DC 20002; ACT at P.O. Box 14098, Washington, DC 20044.

Current Roster: US Science Attaches at Posts Abroad

Having survived the Reagan budget blade—in defiance of some informed expectations—the corps of science and technology counselors, attaches and officers at US embassies and missions around the world remains a valuable information source that's largely neglected by the scientific community.

Though these public servants never express gratitude for SGR saying so, they generally know a lot about research activities, government programs, and so forth in their territories, and sometimes they'll help an inquiring countryman. That's why, from time to time, we publish an updated roster to reflect their comings and goings, of which there have been a good many lately. The address in each case is name, title, US Embassy (or Mission as indicated), city and country.

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Belgrade	Sidney Smith, Attache
Brussels (US Mission to European Commission)	John Fry, Attache
Bucharest	John Zimmerman, Attache
Bonn	Allen Vander Weyden, Counselor
	Frank Goldner (DOE), Attache
Geneva	Gordon D. Cartwright, Science Liaison Officer
London	Justin Bloom, Counselor
Madrid	Frank Kinnelly, Attache
Moscow	John Joyce, Counselor
Ottawa	Richard Getsinger, Counselor
Paris	Abraham Friedman, Counselor
	Adrienne Stefan, Science Officer
(US Mission, OECD)	Robert Morris, Counselor
(US Mission, UNESCO)	John Granger, Attache
Rome	Lawrence Finch, Counselor
Stockholm	Albert Chapman, Attache
Vienna (US Mission to Int. Atomic Energy Agency)	Peter Brush, Attache
Warsaw	John Zerolis, Attache
Buenos Aires	vacant
Mexico City	Clifton Metzner, Counselor
	Charles Finan, Fisheries Attache
Brasilia	Daniel Serwer, Attache
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	Dennis O. Johnson, Attache
Tel Aviv	Dennis Jett, Attache

SCIENCE BOARD

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for a more aggressive and direct approach on behalf of the directors and management of the Foundation...The Board has not been aggressive enough in insisting that it should have the appropriate level of staffing to deal with its affairs. One reason for our current confusion is that there has been a little too much togetherness. We must have a more aggressive style on the part of the whole structure."

In general, the members of the Board were reluctant to support a minute—drafted by Branscomb prior to the meeting—suggesting that there had been a consensus that "the policies, environment and conditions of the 1980s provide an opportunity for science policy leadership" which should be grasped by both the Board and the Foundation. Although emphasizing that the Board "could and should not play the role of the PSAC," Branscomb suggested that the time was ripe for it to "provide leadership among government and non-government organizations." But such broad goals were not eagerly embraced by all Board members. "This is a subject which interests some of us more than others," said Doan. "Some people do not think in these terms at all; it would not surprise me if some [board members] are sleeping through this session."

In the end, though, it was agreed that, while not acceding to the consensus statement which Branscomb had drafted, the proposals made by Smith in his report—whose final version is expected to be published and made widely available shortly—would be discussed in the various NSB committees. "We want to keep things perking and bubbling for a period of time," said Board member Charles P. Slichter of the University of Illinois. This seemed to satisfy Branscomb.—DD

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DNA Committee Acts to Ease Research Rules

With a 16-3 decision, the National Institutes of Health Recombinant DNA Advisory Committee (RAC) has, in effect, given approval to a proposal to make the agency's guidelines on gene-splicing research voluntary. RAC, which took the action September 10, will make a final recommendation on the proposal at its next meeting, in January, after reviewing public comments. But the final version is almost certain to be nearly identical.

Although the five-year-old guidelines have been greatly eased over the past few years, the new proposal would eliminate penalties such as the loss of federal grants that NIH-supported researchers now face if they violate the guidelines. It would also permit researchers to perform previously prohibited experiments—producing more than 10 liters of organisms altered by gene-splicing or using such organisms in humans, for example—and eliminate a federal rule that biosafety committees at universities and other institutions must review recombinant DNA experiments before researchers perform them.

Many researchers have come to detest the mandatory guidelines, because they delay experiments and imply that scientists can't be trusted. And biosafety committee heads from many of the major research universities claim the voluntary regulations will have no adverse effect on safety and will not result in a dismantling of the 200 or so biosafety committees now in existence. The main effect, they said, will be greater freedom and fewer administrative burdens.

Most RAC members at the meeting, reflecting the sentiments of those who have had to comply with the guidelines, agreed that virtually all recombinant DNA experiments have so far been found to be no more dangerous than other biological experiments and no longer need federal regulation. The problem then, as one committee member put it, was how to eliminate federal regulation and continue to satisfy public concern about the research which generated such a major controversy in the mid-1970's.

David Baltimore, MIT Professor of Microbiology who, with Stanford biologist Allan Campbell, initially proposed the change in the guidelines in April, suggested keeping some federal involvement by maintaining the NIH Advisory Committee for institutions that wished to continue referring experiments to it for approval. That suggestion and another—to recommend that researchers refrain from conducting hazardous experiments, such as those involving the transfer of drug-resistant traits to disease-causing organisms—were incorporated into the RAC proposal.

But Richard Goldstein, an Associate Professor of Microbiology at the Harvard Medical School and one of three RAC members who voted against the proposal, said the recommendation to keep the guidelines, but make them voluntary, may not be enough to "prohibit" the experiments. He also questioned whether oversight of gene-splicing experiments should be left to scientists and biosafety committees, when many committees have been found to operate and interpret the guidelines differently.

Other RAC members echoed the concerns of observers in the audience who charged that the one-day deliberation by the committee was too quick for such a major decision and that many people were unaware of the proposal because it wasn't widely publicized. But time constraints and the opportunity for a second look in January convinced many RAC members to give the proposal their approval, a decision which, a disgruntled Goldstein charged, was influenced by the fact that many RAC members were financially tied to biotechnology companies that would benefit from the change.

In any case, the outcome for researchers in cities or states with existing gene-splicing laws could be moot. Boston, Cambridge, Amherst, and Emeryville, Calif., and New York State are some of the areas with recombinant DNA regulations on the books that researchers must comply with regardless of NIH's decision. And Harvard's O'Brien said that if the proposal creates alarm among the public, some cities could even force researchers there to comply with more stringent guidelines than those currently enforced by NIH.—KM

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